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FORCE STRUCTURE:

MEETING CONTEMPORARY REQUIREMENTS

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FORCE STRUCTURE: MEETING CONTEMPORARY REQUIREMENTS

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FORCE STRUCTURE IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY REQUIREMENTS

The Soviets have continuously restructured and reequipped their forces to match the current state of Soviet military doctrine, military science, military art, potential areas of military operations, and prospective enemies. The process is evolutionary yet dynamic, and while smaller changes occur constantly, at times major restructuring reforms have occurred to accommodate major changes in the military environment.

Since 1945 the Soviets have conducted four major reforms of their force structure. Immediately after the end of the war, the Soviets, in the midst of demobilization, reorganized their ground force structure to create a new Soviet Army capable of conducting war as required by new political realities and in the environment of central Europe. Experience late in the war clearly indicated that the force structure had been too tank-heavy and that it lacked combined arms balance necessary to fight successfully in the more heavily forested, urbanized, and hilly central European region. Post-war restructuring remedied these shortcomings while preserving the basic operational and tactical techniques which had produced victory in 1945. *Keywords: Reports. (KR)* ←

During 1946 the Soviets converted their tank armies, tank corps, and mechanized corps into mechanized armies, tank divisions, and mechanized divisions. The new armies and divisions were better balanced combined arms entities which incorporated into unit TOEs subunits which had been routinely attached in 1945.

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Post-war restructuring created forces which could carry out those important combat functions which had proved so critical in achieving victory in the war. The new mechanized armies, operating singly or in pairs, served as front mobile groups to exploit offensive success into the operational depth. The separate tank and mechanized divisions performed the same function for armies. Mechanized divisions assigned to rifle corps served a dual purpose: either as reinforced forward detachments or as a mobile force to complete the tactical penetration and initiate exploitation into the operational depths.²

After Stalin's death in 1953, (between 1956 and 1958) the Soviet High Command again restructured ground forces, mechanizing and motorizing all elements of the force and tailoring them to fight and survive in an atomic environment. The Soviets replaced their large mechanized armies and mechanized and rifle divisions with smaller tank armies and motorized rifle divisions.³ The new force was more mobile, less vulnerable to atomic attack than the more ponderous mechanized forces had been, but still sufficiently strong in infantry, tanks, and artillery to engage in intense conventional combat.

Basic operational and tactical combat techniques did not change significantly after 1956. The new tank armies served as front exploitation forces, and the refurbished tank divisions did the same at army level. Because all forces were now mobile, the Soviets ceased using the term "mobile group." While tank armies

and tank divisions conducted operational maneuver. forward detachments conducted tactical maneuver for tank forces, combined arms armies, and motorized rifle divisions in penetration operations, against hasty defenses, and in the exploitation and pursuit phase of operations.⁴

A major shift in Soviet military doctrine occurred after 1960, when Premier N. S. Khrushchev declared that a revolution had taken place in military affairs. Marshal V. D. Sokolovsky's 1962 work Voennaya Strategiya [Military strategy] summed up the change: "On the battlefield the decisive role will be played by the fires of nuclear weapons, the other means of armed conflict will utilize the nuclear attack for the final defeat of the enemy."⁵ Soviet acceptance of the notion that future war would inevitably be nuclear had a serious effect on traditional Soviet views regarding operations and the Soviet Army force structure. Strategic matters, and the newly created Strategic Rocket Forces, eclipsed traditional concerns for operational art and the role of ground forces in conducting tactical maneuver. Rocket-nuclear forces were now "the main means of destroying operational large units of all types of enemy forces."

After 1961, the Soviets tailored their force structure to operate in the "single option" of nuclear war. Tank armies, combined arms armies, and motorized rifle divisions were lightened in manpower and weaponry and tank armies and tank divisions became more tank-pure on the assumption that armored forces could best survive on the nuclear battlefield.⁶

Simultaneously with Khrushchev's ouster from power in 1964, evidence began appearing which reflected the Soviet military's discomfort with recent doctrinal trends. Although probably not altogether happy with the reduced stature of the ground forces, military theorists had temporarily accepted the revolution in military affairs as long as the United States retained clear nuclear superiority. As that superiority began to wane, however, and the U.S. itself shifted from the strategy of massive retaliation to flexible response, a Soviet return to the conventional option became, at first, a faint hope.

The transformation in Soviet military thought from hope to a renewed conviction that war could be kept conventional took many years to mature fully. Transformation first required that the Soviets checkmate U.S. nuclear capabilities at each level (strategic, theater, and tactical) and then, as the world wearied of the specter of nuclear war, changing political conditions could pave the way for reduction of nuclear arms, and perhaps, ultimately, their partial or full abolition. These developments could return warfare to the conventional realm where the Soviets were far more capable and, hence, more comfortable. The Soviets realized this process might require years, perhaps even decades. Meanwhile, they sought to fashion strategic, operational, and tactical combat techniques which would make any opponent's decision to use nuclear weapons even more difficult. Foremost among these techniques was the concept of anti-nuclear maneuver.⁷

Soviet ground force strength and composition reflected Soviet warfighting concepts. Within the expanding ground forces, formations and units grew in size and came to reflect a combined arms balance so necessary to succeed in conventional operations. Tank armies and divisions received new complements of mechanized infantry; all divisions grew in manpower, tank, and artillery strength, and mobility. The logistical structure was streamlined to better support sustained deep conventional operations.*

As early as 1972 Soviet theorists noted the basic requirement for a more carefully articulated force structure. V. Ye. Savkin wrote "The difference in composition of troops operating on the axes of the main attack and on other axes probably will be less sharply expressed than was formerly the case. The main troop groupings will be distinguished more in the qualitative sense than in numbers." Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s the Soviets carefully analyzed contemporary warfare (Vietnam, 1973 Israeli-Arab War, the Falklands War, and the war in Lebanon) and noted the impact of new weaponry on combat (for example, ATGMs). Through a series of major exercises (Dnepr - 1967, Dvina - 1970, Yug - 1971 and others) the Soviets tested concepts, forces, and new equipment mixes.

Reflecting that experimentation, the Soviets fielded a broad array of new weaponry to match the requirements of the times (ATGMs, armored vehicles, tanks, self propelled artillery, mobile bridging, etc.). A variety of supporting functional units evolved to meet the same new combat demands. Air assault

battalions and brigades now provide a new vertical dimension to both operational and tactical maneuver and may be supplemented in the future by air assault units at division level and by even larger, more capable divisional-size air assault corps.

Diversionsary brigades add a new dimension to deep operations by further threatening the security of a potential enemy's rear areas. In many respects, these units represent an attempt to replicate the extensive partisan and diversionsary operations of the Second World War, which by 1944, materially assisted operations by operational maneuver forces. Creation of assault helicopter formations as flying artillery or tanks assists more traditional aviation units in providing necessary air protection for deep operating forces.

Along with these structural changes, the Soviets have experimented with new types of forces modeled closely, in their combined arms mix, after the former mobile groups and forward detachments. Experimental corps of mixed brigade composition reflect Soviet testing of formations suited to conduct operational maneuver. These corps, depending on their mix of tank and motorized rifle brigades, may be named tank, mechanized, or combined arms. Experience has convinced the Soviets that the composition of such corps operating as operational maneuver groups depends largely on the nature of the enemy and the area of operations. Ultimately these corps will replace forces designated to conduct operational maneuver already in the force structure.

Within armies and divisions the Soviets have fielded reinforced tank regiments and battalions whose structures resemble former tactical maneuver forces (forward detachments). The large separate tank regiment at army level has evolved from the former heavy tank/SP gun regiments which were earlier employed both to facilitate penetrations and spearhead exploitations. The separate tank battalion, by virtue of its strength and reinforced composition, resembles the wartime tank brigades which served as forward detachments for tank, mechanized and rifle forces.

The Soviets have reorganized and reequipped specialized forces as well. Airborne divisions have been fully mechanized and restructured with the introduction of the BMD combat vehicle and assault guns. Naval infantry forces have been reorganized from regiments into brigades, and the Soviets have created a naval infantry division. Throughout the force structure the Soviets have streamlined logistics by creating material support units at the tactical and operational levels. Most force structure changes seek to create more flexible forces capable of performing the critical functions of tactical and operational maneuver in theater war.

Careful Soviet analysis of contemporary physical and technological requirements of theater warfare have affected the nature of force structure changes. Soviet analysis of combat in Afghanistan, physical aspects of central European terrain, and the impact of new weaponry have prompted change. Re-publication

in 1985 of a 1946 speech by General P. A. Rotmistrov to GOFG probably underscores Soviet belief that they face force structuring problems similar to those they faced in 1946--namely to replace the former armor-heavy force with a balanced combined arms force which can cope with warfare in an age of high technology weaponry, on an increasingly urbanized and forested battlefield in central Europe, as well as in other varied regions of the world. Rotmistrov, then chief of armored and mechanized forces in GOFG, analyzed 1st Belorussian Front armored operations during the Berlin operation and concluded that the Soviet force structure was too tank-heavy and that it lacked the combined arms balance necessary to fight successfully in more heavily forested, urbanized, and hilly central Europe.¹⁰ Re-publication of Rotmistrov's speech, in all likelihood, signifies that the process of force structure reform is well underway, if not nearly complete. This restructuring is likely to reach down to regimental and battalion level as the Soviets provide these units and subunits with a combined arms mix more suited for their increasingly independent role in operations.

Experience has shown the Soviets believe offensive success has depended, and will continue to depend, on effective conduct of maneuver through use of maneuver groups. To be effective these groups must possess combat qualities which distinguish them from the remainder of the force structure. In the past (prior to 1954) armored or mechanized forces played this role because their superior firepower and maneuverability accorded them marked

advantage over foot or hoofbound forces. In earlier stages of mechanization and motorization (1955 to 1960), tracked units were used because of their firepower, superior cross-country mobility, and reduced vulnerability to nuclear effects. More recently (the 1970s) armor-heavy units have performed the role because of their strength and speed.

Today armor is integrated throughout the force structure, and most units are highly mechanized. In addition, proliferation of sophisticated anti-tank weaponry and other fire support means has forced the Soviets to look for other attributes which can provide necessary unique qualities to operational and tactical maneuver forces. They believe they have found the answer through development of sophisticated, integrated concepts for operational and tactical maneuver; careful tailoring of maneuver forces to improve their survivability and sustainability; development of command and control measures suited to such operations; employment of pre-combat formations which permit units to fight in other than linear formation; exploitation of the time factor in operations by the use of norms and operational and tactical calculations in both routine planning and planning during combat; and, finally, increased reliance on the vertical dimension of maneuver.

Current sophisticated Soviet maneuver concepts, involving concerted use of multiple tactical and operational maneuver groups, exploits the fact that quantity has a quality of its own. Multiple maneuver groups operate in tandem, employing techniques

specifically designed to pre-empt, unhinge, and paralyze a defense. Their sheer number contributes to the likelihood of their success.

Extensive Soviet study of past operational and tactical maneuver indicates they must continue to pay close attention to the structure of operational and tactical maneuver groups. The necessity for concealing both their intent to employ maneuver and the manner in which they will conduct it, requires that they pay increased attention to combat deception. While it is virtually impossible for the Soviets to conceal their intent to employ maneuver, it is possible, through use of deception to conceal those forces which will conduct it. This the Soviets have done extensively and effectively in the past.

Deception will make it difficult for Westerners to ascertain the exact Soviet force structure, to detect accurately alterations in that structure, and to identify which units which will perform precise missions. It is likely the Soviet peacetime force structure does not actually mirror wartime structure (at least in terms of unit designations), and peacetime order of battle almost certainly does not reflect wartime order of battle.¹¹

Several tentative judgments can be made concerning the future Soviet force structure. All are based on the premise that both tactical and operational maneuver forces exist in peacetime and will be used in wartime. Currently Soviet wartime force structure appears to consist of fronts, consisting of three-four

combined arms and one-two tank armies. Armies consist of a combination of tank and motorized rifle divisions and separate specialized units (figure 1). Tank armies perform the function of operational maneuver at front level, either singly or in pairs and within the combined arms army, the tank division performs the same function. Separate tank regiments of combined arms armies (the size of a former tank corps) and separate tank battalions of motorized rifle divisions (the size of the former tank brigades) perform the tactical maneuver function. Designated operational and tactical maneuver forces today probably secretly carry the designation they have had in the past, that of corps and brigade.¹²

The Soviets may overtly convert front operational maneuver groups into corps configuration (figure 2). In this case tank armies would consist of a combination of tank and mechanized corps with tank corps tank-heavy; and mechanized corps balanced combined arms entities. The corps will include a separate tank or motorized rifle brigade to serve as corps forward detachment and carefully tailored support.

Within combined arms armies, tank or mechanized corps will conduct operational maneuver and employ its own tactical maneuver force in the process. Separate tank corps or brigades will serve as army forward detachments. Motorized rifle divisions will employ separate tank or motorized rifle brigades as their forward detachment.

Figure 1

<u>CURRENT SOVIET FORCE STRUCTURE</u>	
<u>UNIT</u>	<u>FUNCTION</u>
Front	
3-4 combined arms armies	
1-2 tank armies	operational maneuver
Combined Arms Army	
2-4 motorized rifle divisions	operational maneuver
1-2 tank divisions	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank regiment	
Tank Army	
2-4 tank divisions	
1-2 motorized rifle divisions	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank regiment	
Motorized Rifle Division	
3 motorized rifle regiments	
1 tank regiment	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank battalion	
Tank Division	
3 tank regiment	operational maneuver
1 motorized rifle regiment	

FUTURE SOVIET FORCE STRUCTURE

OPTION 1

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>FUNCTION</u>
Front	
2-4 combined arms armies	operational maneuver
1-2 tank armies	
Combined Arms Army	
3-4 motorized rifle divisions	operational maneuver
1 tank on mechanized corps	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank brigade	operational maneuver
Tank Army	
2 tank corps	tactical maneuver
1-2 mechanized corps	
1 separate tank brigade	
Motorized Rifle Division	
3 motorized rifle regiments	tactical maneuver
1 tank regiment	
1 separate tank brigade	operational maneuver
Tank Corps	
3-4 tank brigades	
1 motorized rifle brigade	operational maneuver
Mechanized Corps	
3-4 mechanized brigades	
1-2 tank brigades	

Figure 2

The Soviets will continue to employ air assault forces in cooperation with operational and tactical maneuver forces. In some instances, air assault units perform the maneuver function in their own right.¹³ While multiple air assault brigades or a full air assault corps will cooperate with a front or an army OMC, air assault brigades will operate in tandem with either army OMCs or the army forward detachment, and an air assault battalion (heliborne) will cooperate with either the army forward detachments or similar divisional entities. The motorized rifle division will employ an air assault company or battalion to support division forward detachment operations.¹⁴

The Soviets can conceal operational and tactical maneuver elements within their force structure by converting the entire force structure to corps configuration (figure 3). In this case both combined arms armies and tank armies would consist of a varied mix of tank and motorized rifle corps (former divisions), each of which would consist of brigades. Designated corps and brigades could perform operational and tactical maneuver functions while the remaining units would fulfill a wide range of general combat tasks. Adoption of a corps structure would not only conceal the operational and tactical maneuver core of the Soviet armed forces. It would also blur distinctions and comparisons between NATO and Soviet forces and accord potential advantage to the Soviets in MBFR discussions. The tailoring involved in creating such a force could permit reduction in the

Figure 3

FUTURE SOVIET FORCE STRUCTURE

OPTION 2

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>FUNCTION</u>
Front	
2-4 combined arms armies	
1-2 tank armies	operational maneuver
Combined Arms Army	
3 mechanized corps	1 for operational maneuver
2 tank corps	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank brigade	
Tank Army	
2 tank corps	
1-2 mechanized corps	tactical maneuver
1 separate tank brigade	
Tank Corps	
3-4 tank brigades	operational maneuver
1 motorized rifle brigade	
Mechanized Corps	
3-4 mechanized brigades	
1-2 tank brigades	

quantity of some weapons systems (most notably, tanks) and create perceptions in the West of a reduced threat.

At the tactical level the Soviets are already committed to tailoring forces to a greater extent than in the past. In 1986 Colonel General D. A. Dragunsky noted "the revived capabilities of the battalion, and the increased significance of the independent operations of subunits, naturally places great demands on the commander."¹² Dragunsky's work reflects a growing trend among Soviet theorists to argue for greater tailoring of forces at regimental and battalion level, so that these forces can operate more independently and better sustain operations.

The tailoring process is likely to involve reassignment to army level of those forces and weapons not of immediate use to battalions, regiments and divisions (or brigade and corps). Conversely, forces and weapons of immediate use to battalions and regiments, such as anti-tank, self propelled artillery, anti-aircraft, tactical bridging, engineer assets, some helicopter lift, etc. will be assigned to those subunits and units in greater quantities.

The new Soviet force structure, characterized by force tailoring at all levels, will better match current Soviet combat requirements when they state "With the enemy using high precision weapons, the role of the first echelon has to grow. It must be capable of achieving a mission without the second echelon."¹³

ENDNOTES

1. S. A. Tyushkevich, ed., Sovetskiye vooruzhennyye sily [The Soviet armed forces], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978) 393; A. Dunin, "Razvitiye sukhoputnykh voysk v poslevoyennyy period" [The development of ground forces in the postwar period], Voenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal, No. 5 (May 1978), 34-35. Hereafter cited as VIZh.
2. "Osnovy obshchevoyskovogo boya (Lektsiya)" [Principles of combined arms battle (a lesson)], Vystrel' [Vystrel' advanced infantry course], translated by Directorate of Military Intelligence, Army Headquarters, Ottawa, Canada, 1954.
3. Marshals G. K. Zhukov and R. Ya. Malinovsky were defense ministers during these reforms. See Dunin, 38. At this point Soviet description of their force structure shifts into use of generic terms and comparisons between old and new units on the basis of percentage changes in strength and firepower. More detail is available in "Recent Changes in Soviet Divisional Organization," Intelligence Review, No. 222 (August-September 1955), 10-14; "Organizational Employment of Soviet Line Divisions," Intelligence Review, No. 254 (July 1962), 9-12.
4. N. Kireyev, "Primeneniye tankovykh podrazdeleniy i chastey pri proryve oborony protivnika" [The use of tank subunits and units during the penetration of an enemy defense], VIZh, No. 2 (February 1982), 37; "Soviet Tactics: Medium Tank Regiment," Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 30-77, (Washington, D. C.: Headquarters, Dept of the Army, November 1960), 2; V. A. Semenov, Kratkiy ocherk razvitiya Sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva [A short survey of the development of Soviet military art], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1960), 290-291.
5. V. D. Sokolovsky, Voennaya strategiya [Military strategy], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963), 383.
6. Dunin, 38-39; "Soviet Field Armies: Organizational and Operational Concepts," Intelligence Research Project, No. P3-10, (Washington, D. C.: OACSI, 1962), declassified. Average size wartime fronts would consist of a mixture of combined arms and tank armies: the combined arms army of three or four motorized rifle divisions and one tank division and the tank army of two to four medium tank divisions; possibly one heavy tank division; and under special circumstances, a motorized rifle division.
7. Among the articles on anti-nuclear maneuver were F. Sverdlov, "K voprosu o manevre v boyu" [Concerning the question of maneuver in combat], Voennyy Vestnik, No. 8 (August 1972), 31; V. Savkin, "Manevr v boyu" [Maneuver in battle], Voennyy Vestnik, No. 4 (April 1972), 23. Hereafter cited as VV. For a more

contemporary expression of this view see V. G. Reznichenko, Taktika [Tactics], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987), 72.

8. Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 100-2-3, "Soviet Army Troops Organization and Equipment," July 1984, 4-48.

9. V. E. Savkin, Osnovnyye printsipy operativnogo iskusstva i taktiki [Basic principles of operational art and tactics], (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1972), 228. Translated by US Air Force.

10. "Iz doklada komanduyushchego bronetankovymi i mekhanizirovannymi voyskami Gruppy sovetskikh voysk v Germanii marshala bronetankovykh voysk P. A. Rotmistrova na voyenno-nauchnoy konferentsii po izucheniyu Berlinskoy operatsii" [From the report of the commander of armored and mechanized forces of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, Marshal of Armored Forces, P. A. Rotmistrov, at a military-scientific conference on the study of the Berlin operation, VIZh, No. 9 (September 1985), 43-50. Support units added to Soviet armies and divisions have had the same effect as those added to Soviet units in 1946-47. They have improved the combined arms balance of the entire force. In addition to republishing Rotmistrov's report, the Soviets have published an increased number of articles dealing with operations in difficult terrain. While some of these reflect Soviet concern with warfare in Afghanistan, they also clearly pertain to operations in central Europe. These articles include six on the subject since May 1980 in Voyenno-istoricheskiy Zhurnal [Military historical journal] and many in lower level journals.

11. The Soviets have been masters at concealing actual combat organization of their forces, both during wartime and before the outbreak of war. They did this well against the Germans in June 1941 (although almost for naught) and again in August 1945 against the Japanese. During wartime, although German intelligence maintained a fairly complete Order of Battle for Soviet forces, they were repeatedly deceived regarding specific locations of major units and the organization of forces facing them in critical sectors. See David M. Glantz, Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War [London: Frank Cass, 1988]. For example, given the irrational composition of Soviet armies in GSFG, the disfunctional location of subordinate units, and Soviet past practice, it is virtually certain that wartime organization will differ from peacetime organization.

12. The appearance of new corps-type entities is consistent with the manner in which the Soviets have experimented with and formed new units in the past; in particular the way the Soviets developed operational maneuver forces during the war years. The appearance of brigade-type structures within motorized rifle divisions in forces deployed within the NATO Forward Area suggests Soviet experimentation with, and perhaps fielding of, tactical maneuver brigades designated to operate within

divisions. These brigades also have direct antecedents during the war years.

13. Recent Soviet articles talk of air assault units performing as forward detachments in their own right. See, R. Salikhov, "V peredovom otryad" [In a forward detachment], VV, No. 3 (March 1987), 33-36.

14. See, J. F. Holcomb, Jr.; G. H. Turbiville, Jr., "Exploiting the Vertical Dimension: Continuing Development of the Soviet Desant Force Structure," (Ft Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1987), 22-27.

15. D. A. Dragunsky, Motostrelkovyy (tankovyy) batal'on v boyu, [The motorized rifle (tank) battalion in battle] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), 9.

16. Yu. Molostov, A. Novikov, "High-precision weapons against tanks," Soviet Military Review, No. 1 (January 1988), 13.